

EXPECTATION AND PERCEPTION OF POSGRADUATE STUDENTS FOR
SERVICE QUALITY IN UTM

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ABSTRACT

Service quality has become predominant part of all advanced organization's strategic plan. Higher attention on service quality has resulted in increasing and profit or an organizations. Higher education has possesses all the characteristics of service industry such as tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. One characteristic of service quality was added for higher education which is information resources. The main aims of this study were to examine the expectation and perception towards service quality delivered by School of Graduate Studies (SPS) and analyze the gap between expectation and perception using the gap analysis. Using the modified SERVQUAL as a measure, this study asked postgraduate students during 2007/2008 academic session in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia to complete a service quality survey to compare their perceptions and expectations. Therefore, gaps in educational service quality at the higher education can be measured. A comparison of mean expectation scores to mean perception scores revealed a statistically significant relationship using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The finding shows high reliability to all items in the modified questionnaires. This indicated that gap scores, as produced by this scale are valid measurement for overall satisfaction of postgraduate students with the delivery of services by the university. The result also showed that the gap of all dimension of service quality were negative. "Responsiveness" and "empathy" were identified as the most critical dimension for the School of Graduate Studies (SPS). Thus, improvements are required across all six dimension of service quality especially "responsiveness" and "empathy".

ABSTRAK

Kualiti perkhidmatan merupakan aspek yang penting dalam pelan strategik bagi sesuatu organisasi. Kesedaran yang tinggi terhadap kualiti perkhidmatan dapat meningkatkan keuntungan bagi organisasi. Institusi pengajian tinggi mempunyai semua ciri-ciri industri perkhidmatan, contohnya, nyata, kebolehpercayaan, responsif, jaminan dan empati. Satu ciri telah ditambah di dalam kajian ini iaitu sumber maklumat. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji harapan dan persepsi terhadap kualiti perkhidmatan yang disediakan oleh Sekolah Pengajian Siswazah (SPS) dan menganalisis jurang antara jangkaan dan persepsi dengan menggunakan analisis jurang. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan SERVQUAL yang telah diubahsuai, instrument borang soal selidik digunakan untuk menanya soalan ke atas pelajar pasca ijazah semasa sesi pembelajaran 2007/2008 dengan membandingkan diantara jangkaan dan persepsi mereka terhadap perkhidmatan yang diberikan oleh Sekolah Pengajian Siswazah (SPS). Analisis terhadap data ini menggunakan kaedah analisis jurang telah menentukan jurang yang wujud dalam kualiti perkhidmatan yang telah disampaikan. Cronbach's coefficient alpha telah digunakan untuk mengukur tahap kebolehpercayaan dan penulis mendapati tahap kebolehpercayaan bagi item di dalam borang soal selidik adalah tinggi. Ini menunjukkan bahawa skor jurang yang dihasilkan oleh skala yang telah digunakan adalah sah bagi keseluruhan kepuasan hati pelajar pasca ijazah. Hasil daripada kajian ini mendapati bahawa kesemua dimensi perkhidmatan adalah negatif. Dimensi responsif dan empati merupakan dimensi yang paling kritikal bagi Sekolah Pengajian Siswazah (SPS). Oleh itu, peningkatan kualiti perkhidmatan harus dilakukan bagi semua dimensi terutamanya dimensi responsif dan empati.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Antecedent

Since the Asian economic crisis in 1997, Malaysia as well as other countries in the region, have devised innovative ways to encourage students to pursue studies within the country, rather than having to go to overseas. To gain a competitive advantage effort to adopt the quality management system philosophy are fast spreading within the higher education institutions in Malaysia (Sohail *et.al*, 2003) . Furthermore, our country has been distinctly successful in the democratization of higher education, ensuring the broad access to higher education has made us a world success in equitable development. In order to meet the demands of new global challenges, however we must ensure that quality remains an integral focus of higher education.

The university and the faculty are committed towards becoming a world-class university by the year 2010. The major concerns and attribute that cannot be compromised is the issue of quality. Based on the faculty philosophy, vision and mission, it is clear that the faculty is consistently positive towards the quality education and appeared to be very dynamic in the quality approach and its technique. It can be seen in the QMS ISO 9001:2000 certification and the effort put by all the staffs in fulfilling and committing to the requirements of the QA imposed by the Ministry of Education (Ahmad *et a.,l* 2004)

Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah B Hj. Ahmad Badawi says,

“ To need develop the necessary first- class human capital, so that the country can be intellectually self-sufficient and be able to engage as equals the world over, especially in advancing new theories and solution.”

In ninth Malaysia Plan in March 2006, he also asserted

“The development of human capital will intensify. The approach must be holistic and emphasis the development of knowledge, skills, intellectual capital in field such as science, technology and entrepreneurship. Simultaneously, we must develop a culture that progressive coupled with high moral and ethical values. This is what meant by human capital with first class mentality.

Both of the statements above show that the important of developing first-class capital human so that our country will become a competitive country. Higher education is one of the best places to produce the first-class capital human. It intends to strengthen the capability on accountability.

Education is an essential component of skills training which will not only produce a pool of well educated, skilled and highly motivated work force but also produce citizens with high moral and ethical values. Important as it is to produce sufficient manpower for the growth of our nation, it is equally important to also take into account the need for quality, knowledge-based workforce. It cannot be denied that the quality and adaptability of the workforce remains the cornerstone of the country's competitiveness in the international environment. This is why quality education system plays a key role in setting up a framework to ensure that an adequate supply of qualified, highly skilled and well trained manpower is structurally placed.

Meanwhile, according to Berry and Parasuraman (1992), they argue that the strategic success of a service organization depends on the ability of service providers to enhance their images by consistently meeting or exceeding customers' service expectation. These mechanism must be measured regularly to response to the changes of the environment where the expectation of the stakeholder is becoming higher. The findings of the measurement are very useful for the faculty administrators as well as the academic staffs to provide plans and solutions for the continuous improvement so that the service and the program offered are significant to the students.

It is vital to consistently measures the performance of service quality from students' perspective because they are directly involved in the education process. They can be seen and act as a consumer or customer as well as a product of the education institution. Students' view on all aspects of their higher education experiences is essential to monitor the quality of education. The data and information gained will help the service provider and the stakeholder to make judgments about level of quality in particular universities (Brennan *et al.*, 2003).

According to Code of Practice 3rd Edition (2005) in public universities in Malaysia, product's quality such as a prescribed curriculum describe the broad requirements that ought to be made in the broad components of the structure, process and outcomes of higher education as well the institution's quality systems. The guidelines on criteria and standards for higher education in Malaysia have been accepted by consensus by the academic community in March 2002. It provides guidelines on good practices and the general requirements in nine areas in the structure and process of higher education. The categorization facilitates data collection and analysis for self-study and external assessment.

The nine criteria and standards as follows :

- i. Vision, mission, educational goals and learning outcomes;
- ii. Curriculum design and delivery;
- iii. Assessment of students;
- iv. Student selection and support services;

- v. Academic staff;
- vi. Educational resources;
- vii. Program monitoring and review;
- viii. Leadership, governance and administration;
- ix. Total continual quality improvement.

1.2 Problem Statement

Education is a service industry. It needs to adopt the techniques in measuring the quality of its services and the satisfaction of its customers. Service quality also has become a predominant part advanced organization's strategic plan. Increasing attention paid to service quality has resulted more progress and profit in organizations. Higher education possesses all the characteristics of service industry, i.e, intangible, heterogeneous, inseparability, variability, perishable, and the customer (student) participates in the process. However, quality measurement in higher education continues to be a vexing and difficult issue. Most evaluation of higher education have primarily used tangible criteria (Hadikoemoro, 2001).

According to Lampley (1999), the study was that the institution of higher education has not yet established a proven, generally accepted methodology for evaluating the quality of the services they provide. A long list of successes in the for-profit sector has prompted institutions of higher education to imitate the business model of measuring service quality (Milakovich, 1995).

The Higher Education Minister, the Chairman of Barisan Nasional Backbenchers' Club, Barisan Nasional MPs, academics and Malaysians concerned about the quality, standards and excellence of higher education in Malaysia will be invited to give their inputs on how to create a world-class higher education system in

the country, transforming Malaysia into an international centre of academic excellence (Parliament, 2006).

From the universities' perspective, the faculty is seriously committed in fulfilling the requirement of the Quality Assurance Standard regulated by the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia. One important aspect that must be seen and proven is the effort and commitment of the faculty to review regularly the quality of education and services provided to students. For a quite long time there is no special study focusing on the quality of education taking into overall evaluations particularly from students' perspective. It is high time to know the current status and level of service quality in education. The questions about the performance of service quality must be answered (Ahmad *et al.*, 2004).

Further more, Zaini *et al.*, (1997) stated that the development of postgraduate education programs therefore, needs to take into account. Thus the new challenge requires a proactive measure and paradigm shift among those who are associated with the advanced sectors of education in science and technology. An addition Quality assurance in delivery supervision has been given particular emphasis in implementation the quality is monitored and audited accordingly. The School of Graduate Studies (SPS), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia is responsible to ensure that all specific requirement of study are in place and executed properly. Among the role SPS include to ensure that facilities are available to meet both the academic and social needs of graduate students.

Quality assurance of the postgraduate student experience must be assured from beginning to completion and beyond. Quality assurance means the process by which the total postgraduate student experience is supported by system, mechanism and process controls necessary to ensure that the postgraduate student is treated with care attention which befits the customer obtaining university service (Bushaway, 2003).

According to the interview session with the dean of the School of Graduate Studies (SPS) there is no students' satisfaction survey was conducted before. SPS also did not provide any mechanism for students' complaint.

Consequently, this study was designed to test the feasibility of measuring a university's service quality by measuring the gap between student's expectation and experiences among the postgraduate students in higher education. Such gap, or differences, between the customer's expectations and what is actually experienced, is the basis for the gap methodology.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of the research are as follows :

- i) To examine student expectation and perception toward service quality delivered by School of Graduate Studies.
- ii) To analyze the gap between expectation and perception using the gap analysis.

1.4 Scope of the research

The area of study is service quality in higher education. This study focused only postgraduate student currently enrolled in master and Doctor of philosophy available in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. It is focused on the dimensions of service quality from students perspective, particularly in the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. It does not focus on all students. The population of this study was all of postgraduate students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia during 2007/2008 academic session. The result of this study cannot be generalized to other group or students at any other time than the year of this study.

1.5 Significant of the research

The outcome of the study is useful for the university to continuously improve the service quality of education as imposed and required by the ISO and QA standard especially service quality delivered by School of Graduate Studies. The results of the improvement effort finally will benefit the students as well. In the long run, this study is a part of periodically and continuously evaluations and reviews series.

1.6 Methodology

The methodology of this study was in five stages as stated below:

1.6.1 Stage One: Literature Review

At the first stage, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to explain three elements. The first stage concern with the service which described about the definition of service, characteristics of service, higher education as a service industry and the services within the higher education. The second describes to the term of quality including the definition of service, dimension of service, total quality management (TQM) and the implementation of TQM in higher education. The third stage explains the SERVQUAL instrument. SERVQUAL is the instrument or an approach to measure service quality. At this stage, the discussion about the SERVQUAL which are includes the gap in service quality, utilizing of SERVQUAL the validity of the instrument. The last stage includes customer expectation, customer perception and customer satisfaction. All information and sources concerning the service quality were gathered accordingly from books, articles, journals, and other related documents.

1.6.2 Stage Two : Case Study

Case study illustrated the reality in the field of study. Case study was used to observe the development of the study based on the design and ethic (Yin, 1993). For this study, School of Graduate Studies was selected as the case study. The measurement of service quality is focused the service provided by the School of Graduate Studies.

1.6.3 Stage Three : Questionnaire

Questionnaires were developed based on the findings in Stage One and Stage Two. The format of the questionnaire was designed based on the SERVQUAL approach which is discussed in details in stage one. It was then distributed to the postgraduate students from various faculties and departments in UTM. Appropriate statistical analysis methods were adopted for the data analysis process.

1.6.4 Stage Four : Results and Findings

At this stage, the project presents the results of the quantitative data collected from the questionnaires administered to the respondents and subsequent analysis that has been carried out. The mean score derive from the frequency analysis used as the score perception and expectation. The service gap determine by subtraction the perception score and the expectation score.

1.7 Thesis organization

This study is organized and presented through six chapters as below:-

1.7.1 Chapter One : Introduction

Chapter One discussed on the issues in quality service specially in higher education, followed by identifying the objectives of the study, a brief discussion on the scope of study, significance of the study, the research methodology and a thesis organization.

1.7.2 Chapter Two : Service Quality in Higher Education

This chapter was solely concerned on the theoretical or the literature part of the service quality in general and also focused in higher educations context.

1.7.3 Chapter Three: School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

In this chapter, was explained regarding to the background of the Scholl of Graduate Study, the function and the most critical term is the service provided by this organization.

1.7.4 Chapter Four : Methodology

Chapter Four described the research approach adopted for this study, such as explanations on techniques of data collections and the data analysis methods. Each steps

of the research methodology was described, beginning with the initial planning and preparation of this research until the final results.

1.7.5 Chapter Five : Frequency and Gap Analysis

The findings of this study were presented in this chapter. The feedback of questionnaires distributed and analyses of the data were presented in order to achieve the objectives of this study. For the analysis, Microsoft Excel and Statistical Programme for Social Science (SPSS) were used to fulfil the research objectives.

1.7.6 Chapter Six : Conclusion

The chapter ends with concluding notes on the objectives that the project set out to achieve. A conclusion was reached, based on the problem, analysis and findings of the study. Recommendations for further study were also included in this chapter.

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